



# Construction firm graduates from Lab mentoring program

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Rio Rancho-based RG Construction recently became the latest company to graduate from Los Alamos National Laboratory's Mentor-Protégé Program, a U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) initiative designed to encourage and assist qualifying small companies that work with the Laboratory to build a solid and successful business.

During the five-year mentorship, RG Construction grew from a small electrical contractor with six employees to a general contractor with more than 25 employees, running projects worth several million dollars each.

"We're primarily looking for young businesses (including disabled veteran-owned and women-owned) that have the capacity to grow and become more established, and RG Construction are a great example of that," says Jim Carrigan, from the Laboratory's Small Business Program, who runs the Mentor-Protégé Program.

John McKinstry, a First Gulf War military veteran, started RG Construction in 2004, and was accepted into the program in 2013.

"What I wanted out of this program was growth—controlled growth," he says. "I don't just want to get millions of dollars of work. I want to ensure our company has the skills and knowledge to do the work well."

Protégés work with a range of experts throughout the Laboratory to improve their technical and business skills, and receive advice on bidding for Lab and other federal contracts.

The program also calls on resources outside the Laboratory to help. Through a partnership organized by the Lab, McKinstry worked with University of New Mexico Anderson School of Management graduate students to develop a business plan. He also worked on a website, marketing plan, accounting practices, and other operating procedures. His technical mentor from the Laboratory assisted him with project management and handling change orders, as well as safety and security requirements.

The program helped RG Construction to expand their work into Sandia National Laboratory and the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant, and establish connections with other government agencies such as the Army Corps of Engineers.

"While we are happy if our protégés can win larger contracts at Los Alamos National Laboratory, we're also keen for them to diversify both with other government contracts and beyond," says Carrigan.

During its time in the program, RG Construction won the national 2015 DOE Protégé of the Year award, with the Laboratory winning the Mentor of the Year award.

The minimum time period for mentorship is two years, which is extendable for a further three years. With the graduation of RG, there's currently one other company in the program: The Red Team, a veteran/service disabled veteran owned small business that specializes in construction services. Businesses are selected as protégés through an annual competitive application process.

"The last two proteges have been construction companies," says Carrigan. "But the program is open to any qualifying small business that offers a product or service that the Laboratory uses.

"I'm happy to see companies graduate and go on to have a positive impact as a valuable supplier to the Laboratory and other public and private customers."

A wider pool of local successful small businesses helps the Laboratory with more options as it strives to meet its small business procurement goals, which are set each year by the DOE's National Nuclear Security Administration.

[> Learn more about the Mentor-Protégé program here.](#)

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